

Scotland Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee (VAPC) Meeting Minutes
Thursday the 29th of February 2024 (16:00-18:00), Held at Kentigern House, 65
Brown Street, Glasgow, G2 8EX.

Present: Carolyn Caddick, Chair (CC); Andrew Ward, Vice Chair (AW); Huw Sherrard, Secretary (HS); Sue Raw (SRa); Ben Cox (BC); Bill Lindsay (BL); Alan Hamilton (AH); Alec Rose (AR); Iain Findlay (IF); Audrey Cuthbertson (AC); Kate Thomsas (KT); Jim Wilson (JW); Gordon Michie (GM); Mike McCourt (MMcC) Stuart Roberts (SRo); Don Young (DY).

Guests: SH, Scottish Veterans Commissioner (SH); JM (JM); PM (PM).

Apologies: Donald Prentice (DP); Mark Logie (ML); Megan Brackley (MB); Laura Cox (LC); Sandy Reid (SRe).

1. Welcome and Apologies

CC welcomed attendees to the first meeting of the year, especially BC, AR, and GM as newly appointed members of the Committee. CC also welcomed the Scottish Veterans Commissioner, and Patricia Moore from Defence Business Services. HS noted apologies that he had received.

2. Previous Minutes & Matters Arising

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the previous meeting were accurate. CC noted a number of matters arising: the Annual Report from the VAPCs had been distributed among members; CC had requested that the newsletter of the Armed Forces Covenant Trust be shared, and intends to invite AW, the Trust's Chief Executive, to a future meeting; and CC had raised the ongoing issues with the War Widow(er) Pension with other UK Chairs.

3. Scottish Veterans Commissioner Update

CC invited the Scottish Veterans Commissioner to address the Committee. SH provided an overview of her role and remit, before expanding on developments since she last addressed the Committee. This year's focus was Veterans and the Law: veterans in relation to the criminal justice system, but also employment in the law and legal areas, veterans and the police, veterans and prisons, etc. A report on this is due to be published in October. Veterans and finance and the economy will be the focus post October. Regardless, work continues on all subjects: mental health is an ongoing theme.

SH outlined that the challenge was engaging the whole of Scotland, and identified the Scotland VAPC as a valuable asset in this respect. Additionally, as the Commissioner has a purely devolved focus, the Committee could be invaluable in bridging the gap in reserved matters.

CC responded that the Committee was glad to hear about the Commissioner's priorities and indicated that they are also aligned with those of the VAPC. The Committee was keen to learn about initiatives from the Commissioner and happy to share these examples of best practice and learnings from Scotland with other VAPC areas and the UK Government.

BC asked SH how the Committee can help: potentially conducting surveys and research? SH responded that that would definitely be useful. CC also highlighted the value of VAPCs' Special Interest Groups in this regard.

IF asked how the Commissioner used data to inform her work. SH explained that they used data in different contexts. The Committee discussed drug and alcohol data with the Commissioner, and methodological issues surrounding it. IF outlined the value of the recent census, especially with the added question on veteran status, results of which were soon to be released. JW agreed, and SRO provided an update on when the data from the census should be released.

CC invited PM, from Defence Business Services, to address the Committee on her work regarding pensions and compensation. The Committee agreed that PM's input was very interesting and relevant to them and agreed to invite her to hold a workshop for the Committee in the near future. PM stated she would be willing.

4. Chair Update

CC provided an update regarding her work as the Committee's Chair since its last meeting. The Veteran ID Card scheme continued to be rolled out, and HS was asked to distribute the helpline and website among the Committee.

The Northern Ireland VAPC has a new interim Chair, John Stewart, and the Wales VAPC has a new Chair, Lisa Rawlings.

CC has held regular meetings with both from a devolved perspective. CC asked members to advertise outstanding vacancies where they could.

CC outlined that there had been no change to the sponsorship of VAPCs, but that Veterans UK could potentially be rebranded in the near future.

CC shared that a Female Veterans Workshop could be held in Scotland later in the year, depending on available funding. CC agreed to inform the Committee if there were developments, especially female members.

CC updated the Committee on further developments to future legislation on VAPCs, and CC is to attend meetings next month with other Chairs. The Veterans Services Review and Independent Review outcomes were still to be published. The Minister has asked VAPCs to report back on changes and implementation at a local level.

5. Member Recruitment

CC welcomed the three new members of the Committee, and asked them to introduce themselves. CC also noted with sadness that Megan Buckley, Mark Logie, and Laura Cox were standing down, and thanked them for their support and commitment to the VAPC over a challenging period.

CC noted that JW had been co-opted, and proposed to also co-opt SRO.

AH proposed, and BL seconded co-opting SRO. CC noted that AW was the Committee's Vice Chair, and the Committee was due to consider the position again. The Committee agreed that the position of Vice Chair will be added to the agenda of the next meeting.

6. Compensation Performance

Update JW had attended the UK Central Advisory Committee on Compensation meeting the previous week, and shared that there were improvements being made in relation to Veterans UK

and the timeframe for appeals in relation to WP and AFCS. JW noted a number of ongoing issues, but overall had a positive outlook: especially as the number of AFCS and WP claims and that appeals being made electronically had now surpassed those being made using physical forms. CC noted this was very positive, alongside the other improvements - some of which were as a result of feedback via the VAPC.

JW had raised the issue of potentially obtaining data specifically relating to Scottish Veterans. However he had been informed that it would not be possible at the current time. CC stated that she hoped this might occur when further digitisation occurs. It was noted that previously this data had been made available to the Committee, through a Veterans Welfare Service Manager who would attend meetings to provide the report.

7. Members' Coverage

HS described how the data from the survey conducted of Committee members was now available, and a report was to be circulated before the next meeting. JW offered to provide insight as to which Firm Bases covered which local authorities.

8. AOCB

CC noted a number of items of additional business: - JW had attended the CPG on Veterans meeting earlier that month, which focused on the role and function of drop-in centres, which the Committee then discussed. IF asked if there was a central resource that signposted these groups. JW stated that there was, and CC asked HS to distribute this link among the Committee when she received it. CC noted that the CPG meeting had also discussed the new role description for local authorities' Armed Forces Champions, which the Committee viewed positively. - BL provided an update on housing in Scotland, and a number of current and forthcoming issues from his perspective. Among them was decarbonisation, and whether various providers of social housing for the Armed Forces and Veterans could receive it. - The Committee discussed the dates of future meetings. It was agreed that a workshop with PM should be scheduled before the next substantial meeting of the VAPC. The next meeting of the Committee would be online.

Signed as true on 11/06/24, by Carolyn Caddick as Chair:



Carolyn Caddick
